

**In the Claims:**

Please further amend claims 5 and 8 as set forth below in the "Listing of Claims".

LISTING OF CLAIMS

Claims 1-4 (Canceled)

Claim 5 (Currently Amended): A thermal processing unit for conducting a thermal process to a plurality of objects to be processed held in a tier-like manner in a processing container, wherein

the processing container is cylindrically shaped and made of metal,

a heating unit that heats the objects to be processed, and a cooling-gas introducing unit having a plurality of blowing holes for introducing a cooling gas into respective areas in the processing container divided in a height direction of the objects to be processed, are provided in the processing container,

a circular space is formed between the processing container and the plurality of objects to be processed held in a tier-like manner,

the cooling-gas introducing unit is a cooling-gas introducing pipe arranged in the circular space and extending in a vertical direction,

the plurality of blowing holes is formed at suitable intervals in the vertical direction of the cooling-gas introducing pipe for blowing a slewing flow of the cooling gas circumferentially about the circular space, and

each blowing hole is formed at a pipe wall of the cooling-gas introducing pipe to face in the same circumferential direction of the processing container such that each blowing hole blows out the cooling gas in a tangential direction of the circular space, the plurality of blowing holes for uniformly cooling said objects.

Claim 6 (Original): A thermal processing unit according to claim 5, wherein

a plurality of cooling-gas introducing pipes is arranged at suitable intervals in a circumferential direction of the circular space.

Claim 7 (Previously Presented): A thermal processing unit according to claim 6, wherein the plurality of cooling-gas introducing pipes has different lengths in the vertical direction.

Claim 8 (Currently Amended): A thermal processing unit for conducting a thermal process to a plurality of objects to be processed held in a tier-like manner in a processing container, wherein

the processing container is cylindrically shaped and is made of metal,  
a heating unit that heats the objects to be processed, and a cooling-gas introducing unit having a plurality of blowing holes for introducing a cooling gas into respective areas in the processing container divided in a height direction of the objects to be processed, are provided in the processing container, and

the blowing hole is provided with a porous member;

wherein the cooling-gas introducing unit is a cooling-gas introducing pipe arranged in a circular space and extending in a vertical direction comprising a plurality of blowing holes arranged vertically above one another along the pipe, the circular space being formed between the processing container and the plurality of objects to be processed held in a tier-like manner, the plurality of blowing holes for blowing a slewing flow of the cooling gas circumferentially about the circular space to uniformly cool said objects and

wherein each blowing hole is formed at a pipe wall of the cooling-gas introducing pipe to face in the same circumferential direction of the processing container such that each blowing hole blows out the cooling gas in a tangential direction of the circular space, the cooling gas not coming directly into contact with said objects.

Claim 9 (Previously Presented): A thermal processing unit according to claim 5, wherein

the processing container has a volume of about 170 liter, and  
the cooling-gas introducing unit is capable of introducing a cooling gas into the  
processing container at a flow rate of 300 to 500 liter / min.

Claim 10 (Previously Presented): A thermal processing unit according to claim 5,  
wherein

the processing container has a container-cooling unit in which a coolant flows.

Claim 11 (Original): A thermal processing unit according to claim 10, wherein  
the cooling-gas introducing unit and the container-cooling unit are capable of cooling the  
objects to be processed to a temperature of 400 °C to 100 °C at a temperature-fall rate not less  
than about 40 °C / min.

Claim 12 (Previously Presented): A thermal processing unit according to claim 8,  
wherein

the processing container has a volume of about 170 liter, and  
the cooling-gas introducing unit is capable of introducing a cooling gas into the  
processing container at a flow rate of 300 to 500 liter /min.

Claim 13 (Previously Presented): A thermal processing unit according claim 8, wherein  
the processing container has a container-cooling unit in which a coolant flows.

Claim 14 (Previously Presented): A thermal processing unit according to claim 13,  
wherein

the cooling-gas introducing unit and the container-cooling unit are capable of cooling the  
objects to be processed to a temperature of 400 °C to 100 °C at a temperature-fall rate not less  
than about 40 °C / min.